

From: ["Brooks, Karl" </O=EXCHANGELABS/OU=EXCHANGE ADMINISTRATIVE GROUP \(FYDIBOHF23SPDLT\)/CN=RECIPIENTS/CN=78AC91F4DB6D44F58424B504D5AA3C7D-BROOKS.KARL>](mailto:Brooks.Karl@EPA.gov)
To: [KeyesFleming](mailto:KeyesFleming@epa.gov)
[Gwendolyn](mailto:Gwendolyn@epa.gov);
CC:
Date: 9/22/2014 12:22:48 PM
Subject: Re: From Greenwire -- EPA: Regional chief keeps his cool as tempers flare in farm country

Thank you, Gwen. I am glad you guys believe this reflects well on our agency both nationally and here in the Heartland.

U remain my hq hero, too. Keep up the good work.

Cheers
Karl

Sent from my iPhone

On Sep 22, 2014, at 1:02 PM, "keyesfleming.gwendolyn@epa.gov by E&E Publishing" <email_this@eenews.net> wrote:

This Greenwire story was sent to you by: keyesfleming.gwendolyn@epa.gov

Personal message: YOU'RE MY HERO!!!!!! (Gina's too ;-)



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EPA: Regional chief keeps his cool as tempers flare in farm country (Monday, September 22, 2014)

Tiffany Stecker, E&E reporter

U.S. EPA's Region 7 headquarters in Lenexa, Kan., has all you'd expect in a modern suburban office building: certified sustainable construction, an open floor plan with few doors and natural light streaming through the windows.

But the landscape around the building is distinctly rural, with cows, hay bales and, of course, many pickup trucks.

"There's a lot of pickups in the parking lot, which is definitely not like the William Jefferson Clinton building," Region 7 Administrator Karl Brooks said, comparing his building in suburban Kansas City, Mo., to EPA's main headquarters in Washington, D.C.

Brooks is EPA's face and voice in the heartland. And he's the guy who brings concerns of the heartland -- Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska and nine tribal nations -- to EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy in Washington.

"The view out of my window -- not just literally, but political, socially, economically -- is a very different view from the view of [Region 10 Administrator] Dennis McLerren in Seattle or [Region 1 Administrator] Curt Spalding in Boston," Brooks said. "We try to give our boss the benefit of our judgment about the way situations affecting our work are unrolling in our area."

Region 7 is engulfed these days in a high-stakes "situation" with farmers angry over a proposed rule to increase the number of waterways and wetlands eligible for automatic protection under the Clean Water Act. While McCarthy visited Missouri in July in an effort to connect with farmers on the rule, many rural landowners are still unhappy with the proposal that they fear will allow regulation of areas that have long been beyond the federal regulatory reach.

Brooks, 58, isn't sitting back in his suburban office and waiting for trouble to find him.

A marathon runner and avid hiker, he's a go-getter who's been making the rounds to meet farmers. He recently attended the Farm Progress Show near Boone, Iowa, the nation's largest outdoor farm trade show, to talk about water pollution from fertilizer runoff, a major problem in farm country. He helped shape McCarthy's itinerary during her visit and brought her to speak to the Agribusiness Council of Kansas City, a group he likens to the Council on Foreign Relations for its influence on rural opinion.

"The best way to be visible is to go to where American agriculture does its work," Brooks said.

The proposed "Waters of the United States" rule, named after the Clean Water Act term for bodies that can be regulated by government, is only the latest in a long string of EPA actions that have irritated farm groups, led by the American Farm Bureau Federation. From rumors of farm dust regulation to the agency's release of personal information on concentrated animal feeding operations last year, farm groups and rural congressional critics of EPA have painted the agency as antagonistic to agriculture.

Brooks is on guard. He recently defended his agency against public comments from Nebraska's agriculture director that EPA regulations are threatening farmers' livelihoods ([Greenwire](#), Sept. 11).

The regional administrator has managed to stand up for his employer while earning the respect of Midwestern agricultural leaders. To Iowa Agriculture Secretary Bill Northey, Brooks is best at translating EPA's message in a local context.

Northey has worked with EPA to encourage farmers to take on voluntary conservation measures - planting cover crops or reducing the number of sediment-churning tills on their fields -- to improve water quality and control damaging algae blooms caused by excessive nutrients in waterways.

"He really has a good feel of where people are coming from," Northey, a Republican, said of Brooks. "I think he believes that the best way to get change on the ground is to engage our farmers, our farm groups, our farm businesses, [rather] than a regulatory approach."

Brooks' role as liaison took center stage this summer as he hosted McCarthy's visit. Most agriculture groups haven't budged on their opinion of the proposal, but the visit was crucial for EPA, said Bob Petersen, executive director of the Agribusiness Council of Kansas City.

"At the end of the day, did it change anyone's opinion in the room? I'm not sure that it did," Petersen said of McCarthy's round-table meeting with the group. "Was it an important step for Administrator McCarthy? It was."

Petersen added: "She gets admiration and respect for putting herself out there. It's always a lot easier for us to speak to friends and supporters; she could do that all day long. We congratulate her for doing that ... [for] being absolutely straightforward."

Brooks pushes back against the notion that there's a trust deficit between farmers and EPA, or that regulation is unwanted in the region.

"I think there is a high level of technical confidence in the work that EPA does," he said. "I don't think anyone doubts we lack the technical chops to handle the chemical regulation work that we do, the regulation and transport of handling farm chemicals."

What can be lacking, he said, is an EPA presence on the local level. While almost every rural county has a representative from the Agriculture Department's Natural Resources Conservation Service -- the agency that encourages environmental stewardship in farming -- EPA's offices are fewer and far between.

Outside of feedlots and field acres, Region 7 is also home to Kansas City, Omaha, Des Moines, Wichita -- industrial outposts and Mississippi River trade hubs plagued with many of the same environmental problems as the country's more urban regions. Brooks has tussled over the future of aging Superfund sites like the West Lake landfill, a repository for radioactive waste outside St. Louis.

He's led the remediation of a vacant carburetor factory next door to a Boys and Girls Club in one of St. Louis' poorest neighborhoods, which Brooks counts as one of his proudest moments as administrator. And he is the local representative of the administration's strong push to lower carbon emissions from the power sector in a region where 85 percent of electricity comes from coal.

"Behind the scenes, he has to be an advocate for small, aging communities," said Roger Walker, an attorney and executive director of Regform, an organization that helps industry comply with EPA regulations. "You can't strong-arm them into compliance."

'Memories run deep around here'

Growing up in Idaho, Brooks developed a passion for nature. He began his career in the office of then-Sen. Frank Church (D-Idaho), a sponsor of the 1964 Wilderness Act. Photos of his family on hiking and hunting trips adorn his desk. He counts his old boss's namesake, the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness Area along the Salmon River, as one of his favorite walking spots.

Brooks worked as a trial attorney for a decade in Idaho and was elected to three terms as state senator, becoming the first Democrat to represent Boise south of the Boise River in more than 50 years.

Retiring from politics after the birth of his second child, he was picked in 1993 to lead the Idaho Conservation League, the largest citizens' environmental organization in the state.

At 40, he began a career switch in academia, earning a doctorate at the University of Kansas and teaching history there for 10 years. Brooks wrote about water, hydroelectricity in the western United States and the origins of environmental law.

"I think [studying history] has given me a little bit better sense for when the times are to make a difference, where the times are to let the process work itself out a bit," he said.

Each of his roles has given Brooks a different perspective on how organizations work and how to make a difference in environmental quality.

His wide-ranging interests are reflected in his three children. The eldest, Jenni, is soon graduating from law school in St. Louis. Judson is a writer in Los Angeles, although he prefers writing comedy rather than environmental history. Dylan, the youngest, is a forestry student at the University of Montana -- and his father's bird-hunting partner. Brooks and his wife, Mary, a professional indexer and editor of academic books, have been married nine years.

While he strives to create good relationships in the region, Brooks insists he's not just a nice guy. His objective is to give people a chance to be heard and share the information they consider relevant.

"Whether that makes people happy or not is not very much of my concern, but I do want them to feel that we were transparent, we were accessible, we considered the right information and we respect the fact that we work with taxpayer dollars," he said.

"If people have a bone to pick with the agency, I want to hear it, and I'd also like to hear their ideas on how we can do our job better."

The back-and-forth between environmentalists and agriculture is emblematic of the region, Brooks said.

Eastern Kansas is historically a hotbed for conflict. It was a radical abolitionist state during the Civil War, abutting the slave state of Missouri. Today, the states are more likely to quarrel over sports loyalties, the University of Kansas' Jayhawks versus the University of Missouri's Tigers.

"Memories run deep around here," said Brooks, a die-hard Jayhawks fan. "Fortunately, it's more about college sports, but it's very noticeable."

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